

Interviewer: My name is Kelly Kordis. I moved to Estes Park in about the year 2000. Moved into the Colorado Mountain School Guide Shack, a real bargain at \$65 a month. When we were politely asked to leave the shack and moved across town into a little shack that we called “The Chicken Coop” for three years. During that time I was just focused completely on climbing and also trying to make my living as a writer, which so far has worked out. So I’m in a bigger shack now, it’s still a shack, and I climb as much as I can because it’s the thing in life that makes me the happiest.

We are interviewing Tom Hornbein at his house on November 16, 2012. [This interview is also available in video format, filmed by Brian Brown. The interview was transcribed by Tom Williams with assistance from Alicia Mittelman.]

What’s your full name Tom?

Tom Hornbein: My full name, Tom. Thomas Fredrick Hornbein, I was born on November 6, 1930, which makes me just a tad over 82 at this particular moment in time.

Interviewer: Where did you grow up?

Tom Hornbein: I grew up in St. Louis, one of the suburbs of St. Louis, actually. Spent a lot of my life there playing around, climbing trees and had a couple of some very nice routes on our house which had a steep slate roof that I could go up to the top of it and sit on the eve up there and my mother couldn’t find me. I’d stare out and look at the clouds and fanaticize. So I guess being off the ground was something that got into my genes right from the very start. It certainly didn’t come from either of my parents. For some reason I never got around to asking them, they sent me to camp at Trail’s End Ranch just down in Devil’s Gulch Road when I was 13. After being terribly homesick for the first year, that was probably the biggest pivotal event in my life, it transformed my life when I discovered that mountains and cliffs had it all over houses and trees. Everything else that’s happened to me really is, kind of followed that passion for mountains and all they mean in so many different ways.

Interviewer: You ended up doing a profession that had in a way nothing to do with climbing, correct?

Tom Hornbein: Incorrect, no everything connects. I came, well let me just sort of continue that biographical journey a bit. After being a camper for a

while, and of course we were climbing stuff down there out of Glenn Haven and other places that we had no business being on back then with no ropes or nothing. Sometimes we had canayard ropes that we would take along and one of us would climb up and hold on to the end of it so the other younger guys could hold on to it as they scrambled up. It was stuff that made no sense by any modern conceptions of risk. We all survived it fortunately; this story hasn't always been that way. Then I became a counselor at that camp through my college years at Boulder where I started out to become a geologist and got totally absorbed, both first in climbing and cutting labs. In the early onset of mountain rescue, because Boulder was one of the two places where it really began, the other being in the Pacific Northwest in Seattle. I was one of the signers of the Articles of Incorporation of Rocky Mountain Rescue back then. Somewhere around the end of my third year, by virtue of getting involved with rescue and then taking and then teaching first aid, I thought, "I don't really want to be geologist; I'll apply to medical school." And I'll get to what may have been lurking in the background in a moment. But I applied to my home town medical school, Washington University in St. Louis. I didn't have any of the usual premed, but they were willing to look at an oddball back then and figured that maybe with all the rocks I'd had in my life that I'd become a gall bladder surgeon or something like that. So I ended up in St. Louis for my medical school years and during those summers I worked as a Park Naturalist here in Rocky. I of course spent all of my spare time climbing on my days off. So really, this valley was the birthplace of the training ground and ultimately my spiritual home which is sort of why I'm back here now. So that's a little bit of a nut shell. When I got into medical school, I was starting out to be a surgeon, no actually my first thought was that I wanted to be a G.P in a place like Estes or Jackson and this particular medical school is very research oriented and they don't even train primary care physicians, that is family physicians now.

So my next thought was, "Well, I'll go into surgery." My professor of surgery had had some exposure to anesthesia, maybe he saw some non-talents in me that I didn't perceive in myself. He said, "I can train a monkey to do a hernia operation, why don't you think about anesthesia?" So I did, I knew nothing about it and during medical school I had no exposure to it whatsoever. It looked to me like it might be a perfect way to combine my interest in taking care of patients with pursuing research. My research interests were focusing around questions that had to do with how people respond to when they go to altitude. I figured, "Well, on being a doc I can focus all my attention here but when I'm doing my research I can be 100% focused there. They don't have to compete with each

other. So this might be a good kind of practice for my interests.” It turned out to be really perfect. After my research training, well after medical school I went out to Seattle and interned for a year and fell in love with the Northwest. Went. Went back to St. Louis for residency training in anesthesia and for two years of NIH supported research training, pursuing my philological dreams or questions. Then got nailed by the Navy to pay off my obligations. The Berry Plan which was something that male medical students back then got sucked into defer their military obligation until they could serve it as a doc afterwards. So I ended up in San Diego at the U.S. Naval Hospital as a young faculty. Never did learn how to salute, which I still don’t know starboard from port. Got involved in a little clinical research there and then the Everest expedition came along, which is another story for another day. After Everest I piled my family into our Volkswagen van and headed to Seattle where I spent 43 years at the University of Washington as a faculty in the Departments of Anesthesiology and Physiology and Biophysics and eventually as Chair of the Department. And had a blast pursuing so many different things that it’s all been, it’s never been dull. So that’s a little bit of a brief sketch and we’ll get back to what got me back here later, I guess.

Interviewer: When you were here first with your climbing, which I guess was at camp and also at the University of Colorado Boulder, do you remember your first technical roped climb and who it was with and which climb it was?

Tom Hornbein: I don’t. What I do remember, but I can’t say for sure that it was my first technical rope climb, I’m sure it wasn’t actually, but when I started in college. I can remember walking into the Hiking Club room at the Student Union Building and there was this curly headed long lanky lad sitting there on the bench, smoking a pipe underneath a big head of a wapiti, a big elk hanging up above. He looked up at me and he said something to the effect, “Do you want to go climbing?” He had been reading a Trail and Timberline Guide to the Flatirons. So he had maybe a 50’ piece of manila rope that he had gotten at the hardware store and we headed up to the Third Flatiron to something called “1911 Gulley” with this rope and the description of the route from Trail and Timberline and then proceeded, one of us would climb up and then drop the rope down for the other one to hold on to. That was my first climbing. I guess I’d not really done rope climbing before then. It didn’t take long for us to realize we needed to learn something, so we started reading. Mainly German literature and belaying the leader and things like that. Eventually, of course, we both ended up, Braddock and I teaching for the phys-ed department, a climbing course at C.U. That was probably two or three years later into the scheme of

things. In the beginning it was all trial and error, it was all manila ropes. Nylon was soon to come but hadn't quite gotten on to the scene then. The pitons that we owned were mainly ones that we could go down to Colorado Springs and extract from the trees and things where the Army had put them in. So we had piles of pitons from these outings collecting soft iron pitons. And Holubar was our main source of supply for imported carabineers and all that sort of stuff.

Interviewer: Then you sort of putting those to use in the Park and at Lumpy Ridge, you pioneered in the '50s and '60s numerous routes in the area. Do any of your first assents in this area particularly stand out?

Tom Hornbein: Well, there's not all that many when you get right down to it. We were just young kids going out on adventures and wandering around looking for things that looked interesting. Part of the scene of course played out down in Boulder on the Flatirons and the Maiden and the Matron and there were some routes down there. Probably the most notable of them I guess, historically at least, being the Northwest Passage on the northwest side of the Third Flatiron. Up here, we'd come up here during breaks between quarters, I think it was quarters. I don't know if it's quarters or semesters. But during those breaks we'd just come up and play. So there were a lot of winter assents of Longs Peak or maybe a lot of winter attempts at assents of Longs Peak, and occasional summer days up there in the middle of January. We and my first time on skis was skiing up to timberline, which was fine with old Army surplus skis and mohair skins. The ride down was something else again. I took out a bit of the vegetation of Rocky Mountain National Park and it took out a little bit of the orientation of my nose. That's sort of how we began to get a taste of winter mountaineering. Sometimes when the weather was awful up on the peak, we'd climb around on the things here in the Valley. I can remember a couple of those in particular during these breaks. One was walking into town because; actually we would camp out or stay out. Julia Morrissey would let us hang out at what was then the Hughes Kirkwood Inn, which is now Rocky Ridge Music School. So we'd put our sleeping bags down on the floor there and then in the daytime. I remember one day Bob Riley and I were going to just go into town, and so we thought we'd hitch a ride and we walked, and we walked, and we walked, and no cars came by. Eventually we got under Prospect Mountain and we looked up at those little pinnacles that are called now the Thumb and the Symbol. The lower one of the two back then was known as "Tom's Thumb" because we went up there and I started leading up, I guess it would be the east side of it, which is now a 5.7 pitch. I got up to

where I didn't think I wanted to go higher, hung till my hands gave out and I said, "Bob, I'm coming down," and I opened my hands and down I came. Then we walked into town and went to Doc Mauls, he put three pieces of tape around my three broken ribs, charged \$6.00 which seemed out of sight. Then the rest of that spring break, my buddies kept me laughing because it gave them great pleasure to watch me gripping my side in pain and laughter all at the same time. I don't know whether there was any other routes on Lumpy Ridge when we climbed what's now known as the Central Chimney on the Twin Owls. It was one of those things where you know we didn't have anything to do and we looked up and we saw it and we walked over and it was an interesting climb, especially the second of the two pitches which I got to lead which was a totally unprotected, at least back then before cams. Kind of flaring chimney, I suspect you've been up there to know what I'm talking about.

Interviewer: Actually I've avoided it because it looks wide and scary. It does have a reputation and I was going to ask, what do you use to protect the wide climbs? We're talking the 1950s, there weren't wide camelots and big bros.

Tom Hornbein: Well, life was simple back then. There were pitons and when you could put them into a crack and sometimes you had to be very innovative. If the crack was too big even for angles, you'd stack pitons. There were things, if you fell off on them, they wouldn't be there of course. It always gave you a little sense of security to move. That was the main thing, probably the one climb that I ever did that after having, well I really lived with it for several years before succeeding in climbing it, was the Chasm View Crack. I guess it's called Hornbein's Crack. The last 60' of that is a little more than vertical and I would guess with jamming techniques, which were not part of our repertoire. Now you might be able to do it with a bit more security, but basically it was lye back. Once you took off, that was it. So you had 60' and you finally got that "thank god" hold up there and your heart could slow down a little bit. I remember thinking that we could go up there and put in some big wooden 2"x4" wedges and pound them in. Not too bright, I think the cheapest one we could buy, which was of course Ponderosa pine, and when you pounded it in it sort of turned into sawdust. Anyway I think I made three attempts on the thing. One was a rainy day when Bob Frausen who was then the Longs Peak ranger, happened to be coming by up above, and dropped a rope so we could get out. Another time we were just at the base of the final pitch, I think that was with Dex Brinker, and somebody was coming off of Broadway onto Mills Land Slide, and slipped and fell and it was a pretty spectacular fall. We thought there was

going to be a body at the bottom of it. But it kind of took the starch out of my sails for leading at that time. The third time we just cruised it. You just had, you couldn't be fiddling around anymore, you just had to get going and do it. But once done, it was I knew it was something I would never want to lead again and I haven't. There's a few things I've gone back to nostalgically in these latter years and that's been fun. The two things I've just touched on, both the Hornbein Crack and the Central Chimney, so far at least I haven't had a great urge to return to.

Interviewer: The Hornbein Crack as it's known, I believe that was 1953, so the Diamond hadn't even been climbed yet. Do you remember looking over at that thing and thinking, "Oh yeah, we'll do that one of these days," or were your thoughts different?

Tom Hornbein: I don't think it would have been '53, is that what the guidebook says?

Interviewer: Yeah, but.

Tom Hornbein: Cause I don't think I was on the scene, well no I was. I'm sorry, it could well be right. In '51, I guess I should mention Zumie's Thumb too.

Interviewer: Yeah, that was next.

Tom Hornbein: Because in a way, that in a way that's one of my most precious climbs. Not because of the Thumb per se, but because of Zumie. This is getting ahead of the story but I didn't meet Zumie until the '90s, but he became a very dear friend and we will come to that I hope in due course. We did go up and climb Zumie's, Dex Brinker and Harry Waldrop and I. We wrapped off into the notch and it was a little bit more of the same. It wasn't easily protected well and the techniques that we, the Crux Pitch. Have you climbed it?

Interviewer: No

Tom Hornbein: The Crux Pitch was just rated at 5.9 now with climbing shoes. With the stuff we had on our feet, I don't think I could have climbed it even then free. But what I was able to do on this last little final bit, it's not quite to the top, but this last little bit is just a scramble, is bring Harry Waldrop up with Dex Brinker down below belaying. Harry stood on a little ledge about that big and I proceeded to climb up Harry, first knees, and then a shoulder and then a head, and then a hand. Then just put my heart in my mouth and over the top of that little last bit I went, and that was it. So we all tucked ourselves together up on the tiny top of this thing feeling very pleased with ourselves. Even Dex who had been at a party the night before and was a little hung over most of the day, it did get

his attention. So it was a wonderful climb and it was even more wonderful as it came back into my life years later.

Interviewer: Just picking up where we left off, how it came back with Zumie.

Tom Hornbein: My summers during medical school were all spent as a Park Naturalist and also sort of the Park authority on rescue as a consequence of the RMR days. I remember going up to the Tetons once and meeting Dick Emerson, who was one of our West Ridge Team on Everest, who was the climbing ranger there and exchanging ideas and stuff. RMR, I got, it was just starting up, I didn't start it. A guy named of Gordon Snow really was sort of. An engineering professor whose name I think, I may get it wrong, but I think it was Hildebrand or something, were the ones that really conceived the idea. But I can remember being right in on the beginning of it with them. A bunch of these ex-veterans from the Second World War and Tenth Mountain troops. People like Wes Horner and Tom Taylor. I can remember one of the meetings; we were discussing building snow shelters, igloos. Taylor comes out with the expression, or describing how you construct or circumcise an igloo. And of course that brought down the house. He didn't realize what he had said. The way we learned how to, the fun is lowering people off of cliffs and stuff like that. This was an undeveloped activity back then in this country. A guy by the name of Wastl Mariner, a German had written a book, which we couldn't read but we could look at the picture. So from Holubar we managed to get this book and we began to play with learning how to lower a Stokes Litter. Our first real serious litter lower was up on the face of the Third Flatiron and a bunch of us went up there and we tucked somebody into the litter and we had it all rigged off of these bolts that had been put up there long before us. We're lowering it down, and all went just perfectly except when we got down the Sheriff was waiting for us at the bottom. Actually back down at Blue Bell Shelter, not at the bottom of the Third Flatiron and concern about what was going on up there, because some woman had been looking out her window and saw the activity up there and called the Sheriff's Office. So we had an agreement after that that when we were going to be doing our play up there that we would let them know ahead of time. The other event that RMR got involved in in '49, well I should say I and a few of my RMR buddies, but we. Dale Johnson and a young friend of his, they had just started school. They thought it would be really neat to have a big "C" painted on the Third Flatiron. So they went up there and they did it. Well some of my Tenth Mountain Buddies got wind of this, because one of my other climbing buddies, Dick Sherman happened to be up there soloing in the moonlight up the Third and came across them and came down and told these tough guys what

was going on. So they met Dale and his friend as they came down and tied them to a tree up by Blue Bell. They eventually got loose, but part of what the judge assigned them as a task was to remove the "C". But then, I think his name was Robert Sterns, the President of C. U. at the time, as they were starting to go about doing this, was beginning to think maybe about the liability of that and decided maybe that wasn't a good idea. So RMR kind of inhabited or inherited the opportunity to remove that "C". So we spent hours, we had a whole stash of paint remover in five gallon Jerry Cans and ropes, and scrub brushes, and god knows what. We spent hours up there dorking around, playing, trying to get the "C" off, and of course, the "C", the paint did come off and under the paint was this very pink outline of a "C" from all the other stuff that had been coating the rock, left and right. So it was visible for a long time and to come after that, and maybe had been refurbished a few times over the course of years. Those were not exactly lifesaving rescue experiences. In fact during those years, beginning years, there weren't many of those. Nothing terribly notable to talk about.

Coming back to the evolution, I graduated from medical school in 1955 and this life of play came to a close. I had to get serious about life. So in '56 I had to intern after my graduation so '55 was my last year here for a long time. I came back in 1973 with Cathy, my wife, now wife, briefly. Two of my kids had been in camp and took Bob and daughter Lynn up Alexander's Chimney on the East Face. That's when I first met Steve Komito who had his shop out at the crossroads at Beaver Point. There was a very brief visit. So between 1955 and 1973 I had no contact with the Park. Then again after that, once I went to Seattle, between work and the North Cascades and the mountains there, we didn't come back here again for almost another two decades. In 1990 the phone rang at our home in Bellevue, Washington and it was a guy by the name of Jim Detterline calling me and saying, "He was putting together a historical symposium." The story behind why this was happening was that that year three guys had walked into the Ranger Station up at Longs Peak Trailhead, three old guys and they were just sort of reminiscing about things. He just listened to them and overheard them. The three guys were Clarin Zumwalt, Hull Cook, and Ev Long, who in their teen aged years had been guides up at the Boulder Field on Longs. This would have been in the early 1930s, about the time I was being born. They would hang out at the Boulder Field Hotel, as it was called and take people who might come up and ride their horses up to the Boulder Field and stay overnight. They would take one, sometimes even two groups of people up the Cable Route on Longs. Otherwise they just played and had a ball. So Jim saw these three who were all about eighty at

the time and thought, “There’s a bit of history there.” This is where the idea of having this event the following year at the “Y” [YMCA] came about. He got the three of them to come and he got Paul Stettner to come. Then I was sort of the next generation down, he invited me. It dribbled down from there through, Layton Kor was there. Through the generations of probably the ‘60s, which was after I had left the scene. Numbers of people talking about climbing on Longs.

This is where I met Zumie. It seemed appropriate from my talk, since I had a good collection of pictures to go with it, to talk about the first ascent of Zumie’s Thumb with him in the audience. The way the thumb had been named is that Ev Long’s brother had just pinned Zumie’s name on to this spike, and Zumie always thought he would love to climb it, but the technology just wasn’t quite there back in those days. It was really 20 years later that we made the first ascent. But Zumie came into my life, here was this bubbly, effervescent, wonderful person and we became fast friends, he and Jim and I. Zumie would come out every summer from Marin County and spend a few weeks. Each summer he’d be a little slower but you walk up to the base. Jim and I would go up and climb things on Lumpy Ridge and Zumie would walk up to the base and just hang out. Each year it got a little more tentative and then in 1995 he’d had some surgery. Following that he went into renal shut down and when he finally kind of woke up from the sedation, he said, “No more.” His wife had died about nine years earlier and I flew down from Seattle, there were some of his friends there at the Audubon Canyon Ranch, which is sort of a bit of wild preserve down on the Balenis Coast. We came down there and we took him home from the hospital and tucked him into bed where he could look out at Mt. Tamalpais. The first thing he wanted was to listen to some music; I think it was La Travoata that I put on to his player. Basically he went home to die, which he did in style over the next couple of days. All of his friends came in, Ev Long and Hull Cook called up, Hull talked to him, Ev did want to talk to him. Ev was having lung trouble and using oxygen down in Boulder at his Iris Farm place. Passed the word through me and then when he hung up, Zumie looks up at me and he said, “Well now, you know Ev, he’s sicker than I am.” Then it was kind of a party for those parting days. Just typical Zumie, what a guy. Before that I remember after we got to know each other, he wanted me to sign a copy of my book, Everest, the West Ridge, the big Sierra Club version, for him. What I inscribed in that, which he cherished, and I too, was, “To Zumie whose thumb I knew long before the rest of him.” So that was Zumie, wonderful human being.

Interviewer: What was Zumi's last name?

Tom Hornbein: Clarin Zumwalt. I don't know, Jim will know, he may have some distant relation to the Admiral, but I'm not sure. So, '91 brought me back to Estes Park and after that I, or we, started coming back for a little while every summer. Well, somewhere during the course of that I was getting near the end of, it was time to retire from my professional career. So we began to think a little about leaving Seattle even though, I did, I don't think Kathy did. Even though it was a wonderful place to live with the best mountains I've ever been in up the North Cascades, it was getting crowded and the traffic was, it was time to just stir things up for another, one more time. So we started talking with Harry Kent and he suggested he might have a piece of land he could sell us up on where he lives. But building a house really at our stage in life, and it's a steep road and old people driving up there in snow. It just didn't, and then all the permitting, it got to be too complicated. So on impulse we started looking around in 2003 and just connected to this place that we're in right now. Purchased this place and then finally moved here in the winter of 2006. Part of my reason for lingering in Seattle is one of my wonderful climbing buddies, Pete Schoening who was the ice axe savior. Pete's most infamous moment, which is immortalized by the ice axe down at the museum in Golden, was saving the fall of his five buddies on K-2 in 1953. Pete had ended up with, diagnosed with multiple myeloma. We would go out and hike every week and as long as Pete was alive I wasn't leaving Seattle. He died in 2004 and then we finally got it together and moved here in 2006.

Interviewer: You're back here in Estes; it brings it a little bit full circle. You've spent a lot of time up around the Longs Peak area. When was the first time you climbed the Diamond, do you remember that experience?

Tom Hornbein: Vividly, I only climbed it once. I was just about 65, would have been 1995. It was the year that the mountain never opened, it was all iced up, so it gets to be a story too. Let me go back to 1991. After this historical event, Jim Detterline and my colleague Brownie Sheaney, who would have been my protégée, he was an Internist, Pulmonary Medicine Doc, who was on a research sabbatic year at something Charlie Houston had started in Keystone called the Colorado Altitude Research Institute. Brownie had a girlfriend called Carmel; they'd been living up in Montezuma. The four of us went up to climb Stetner's Ledges, which I hadn't been back to since the '50s. We did, it was even more notable parts of that were just getting to the base of it because the glacier was very icy and we didn't have anything good

to scratch our feet into it with. But we got up it. At this point, Brownie and Carmel got all excited about the Diamond. I hadn't had any great interest in it. Back in my day it was kind of a peripheral interest and when you had asked about, "Did I think about climbing it," well there was a time, I guess it was in '55 where three of us, Phil Whitterbush, and I'm going to have a senior moment on the guy who was the head of the blister rust crew, and he lives in this area. Do you happen to know who I'm thinking of? Anyway, we went up, we were doing something up there. Somehow into the day got the idea of going out on the Diamond. We walked out Table Ledge and then Phil climbed out about a rope length, probably about where you would top off now from the top of the Casual Route. I got a spectacular photograph of him; it's out in the Domain somewhere at this point. But that was the closest we came to, then when we got down, the Park Service had put out this sign that the "Diamond is closed to climbing."

Interviewer: When was this?

Tom Hornbein: That would have been, I'm guessing, '55. Then of course the pressure mounted and eventually much to Dale Johnson's dismay, the permission was granted to a couple of Californians, Rearick and Kamps and they made the first ascent of the Diamond in '60 or '61, somewhere around then. Of course it's turned into a vertical playground. After the Stetners climb, the idea was we could climb the Diamond and I could climb it even though I wasn't young anymore. We made a number of attempts over the years, we actually on one of them, Jim and Brownie and I and I don't know who, we got caught in the queue on the Casual Route and just decided that we weren't going to get up there that day, so we bailed. Another time we went up, it was Jim and Brownie and Krakauer and I and we were going to be the first in the queue. So we bivvied down around Chasm Lake, got up on a totally malicious day, fog, you couldn't see this far. Went up North Chimney in the dark, we were first in the queue, there was no queue. Once more we couldn't even see the wall, so we got back down by about 9:00am and had a leisurely day. Not long after Brownie came out for one of his four day attempts, which would be flying out one day, going up to bivy the next day, attempting the next day, and flying home the next day. Brownie has yet to climb the Diamond.

Not long after that, just a few days, Jim and George Piva, another one of the Longs Peak rangers, and I went up there and climbed the Casual Route. It was a wonderful experience. You've been Kelly on big walls and you know what they are like, but this was in a way the first time I'd been really on a big high mountain bit of verticality. After a while it just seemed like that vertical dimension

was the way the world was meant to be. It was so exhilarating to just be up there. The climbing of course, it's attention getting. It wasn't all that difficult even at that stage in my life. It was a good work out. There was a couple of guys in their 40s from back in the Northeast who were ahead of us. We managed to stay fairly evenly paced, actually they were behind us. When we got up to where you traverse off to Table Ledge, they were, it was getting pretty late in the day and so we dropped a rope to their leader for that, the crux pitch on the thing. Now there were five of us as we scampered on up to the top. We got to the top, this is summer so it wasn't dark, but it was about 8Tom Hornbein:00 in the evening and the Keyhole Route was still iced up. It had been a spectacular heavy season. Jim and I, actually we went up earlier in the season and climbed the North Face on snow all the way and watched a couple of snow boarders coming down. It was pretty impressive. We didn't have any, we didn't have axes or crampons or that stuff. I thought, "We could bivy up here on top," and Jim thought, "No we can get down ok." So we headed down the Keyhole and it got dark and we decided that, and it was pretty icy so, if you can imagine trying to rappel down the Trough. This may have been the first rappel descent of the Trough. I don't know, but all in the dark and running water and snow and ice and rubble. We managed to devote many hours and we finally got down to where you start the traverse and got a little ways. And then there was this snow field and we couldn't see what was next, so we decided we just have to bivy, which we did, all five of us. I kept waking people up so they wouldn't freeze to death, but it wasn't that cold. You could see the lights of the cars over on Trail Ridge, it was a wonderful bivouac. We can talk more about bivouacs in a bit. It was just one in my litany of unplanned moments, but utterly gorgeous. Jim had called down on his radio for a sort of a rescue. When the sun came up we could see that within one more rappel diagonally down across this snowfield we were home free. So we met our rescue party, I think four of them, as we were just leaving the Boulder Field. They were burdened with Oreos, so we sat there and feasted on Oreos for a while before we headed on down. So that was my one climb of the Diamond, and it was a wonderful wonderful experience.

Interviewer:

Outstanding. You spent a lot of time in the Park over the years back in the '50s and '60s and then more recently. During that gap, for those who don't know, you stated doing a lot of big trips. Pakistan, Nepal, the Karakorum, the Himalaya and you made what's rightly considered one of the greatest assents in mountaineering history. In 1963 you and Willi Unsoeld did the first ascent to the West Ridge on Mt. Everest. How did your experiences in the Park back then help to build up to climbing in the greater ranges?

Tom Hornbein: How did they?

Interviewer: Yeah, did they help prepare you, was it _____?

Tom Hornbein: It was my. Everything that I, that we self-taught ourselves here, was really the preparation for, I guess you say, the big mountains. I didn't have dreams or ever having even expectation I would ever be doing anything like that. All the rock climbing and fiddling around, making our own mistakes and somehow surviving them. The winter camping, the winter climbs on Longs; they were really the underpinnings of everything that followed. I can remember once going up in the winter with Dick Sherman and I had on a pair of, I think Bend iron crampons with no front points. We had pitons and we went up to climb Alexander's Chimney, which was a runnel of ice. I was pounding angles down into the ice and of course they were fine if you were below them. But they came right out the minute that you had a slight upward pull. Here we were in the middle of the night; you could look down at all of the lights of the towns on, Denver and everything down below. It was kind of an eerie but beautiful thing. We didn't know what we were doing and fortunately we managed to not to fall off and climbed it. Those were the learning experiences. When I interned in Seattle I met Mount Rainier with its glaciers. My first real climb of ice there was on Mt. Adams on the glacier on the north side, Adams Glacier, I guess. All I could apply to it was my old rock climbing techniques. I went with some guy that Pete Schoening had connected me with, I don't remember his name. We climbed up it and rock climbing techniques worked just fine with crampons on your feet and an axe. This was in the days before; ice climbing is a totally different ball game now. That was all the preparatory stuff. After my internship I had my first mini-expedition which was to Mt. Huntington in Alaska. Five of us, Fred Beckey, John Rupley, Herb Staley, and Wes Grande and I. We made an attempt on Huntington and had the smarts to bail when we were sort of shoveling our way through corn snow, vertical corn snow. That was my first taste of a little expedition. Flown in by Don Sheldon up the Ruth Glacier and put down just under Huntington. In 1960 my old Cheley buddy, Nick Clinch had been, who's three days younger than I am, had been a camper at Main Camp and I ended up over there one year as a Junior Counselor and we met. Nick became really the major force in organizing expeditions out of this country, including Hidden Peak in 1958, where Pete Schoening and Andy Kauffman made the first American ascent of an 8,000 meter peak. Then in 1960, he put together an expedition to Masherbrum. I was invited to go along, partly as the doc, partly as a climber. This is where I met, it was a very small, a wonderful party. This is where I first met, well no, it's not where I first met

Willi actually. I first met him on that soirée to the Tetons to talk to Dick Emerson about rescue techniques. So Masherbrum, Willi and George Bell, who had been on the '53 K-2 Expedition, got to the top and made the first ascent. Nick Clinch and one of our Pakistanis a couple of days later, while my doc role prevented me from going to the top, though it was close. I remember going to Masherbrum really anxious about how I would do at really high altitude and discovered that it was fine. It was no big deal. You go slow, you puff a lot. So when I was asked, invited to go to Everest, I knew that if I didn't get sick, that physically I was going to be ok. That was probably, having that past experience probably was a real virtue in regard to that.

So Everest was my second big expedition and then as you commented, with Nick primarily, there were a number of little off beat events that came after that. In 1974 we went back to the Karakorum to try to climb a beautiful peak called Piaju and had a death of one of our Pakistanis on that. Made the first crossing out of the Baltoro to the south around Masherbrum, what we called the "Masherbrum Law." Then in '85 we went on a very exotic politically fraught expedition to a peak called Ulugh Muztagh in the vast wasteland of Central Asia with the first American joint Chinese expedition with again, Nick and Bob Bates. They are the two that had put that together. Then back to China again in '88 and '89 to climb a peak between the Mekong and Saul Wing Rivers that has not yet, as far as I know, been climbed but it's taken the lives of quite a. Well there was one big disaster of a joint Chinese-Japanese expedition with 13 climbers, buried I think, in an avalanche. I kind of lost interest in that. That's sort of my exotic climbing history in Central Asia in a nutshell.

Interviewer:

You spent a lot of nights in the mountains throughout your life. One night in particular has become known around the climbing world. It was after you and Willi did the first ascent of the West Ridge of Everest in '63. When you guys you descended the other side of the mountain, and nobody had ever traversed the peak like that before. Darkness fell on you guys and you guys endured a forced bivouac and it sounded like a brutal night at 28,000'. In your incredible book, "Everest the West Ridge," you also described the beauty of that night. It's something it seems you've appreciated the mountains all these years. Would you mind reading that passage for us?

Tom Hornbein:

No, I'd be honored to do that Kelly because with this 50th anniversary coming up, there's a lot of reminiscence going on, but part of what I wrote about that night that we all finally decided that we couldn't see where we were going and we had to just settle out

and hope that we'd still be there in the morning. We each kind of huddled up on our own pack board, pack frames. Willi and I had Keltys and shivered the night away. But it was a magical night in some ways, and what I wrote about it was *"The night was overpoweringly empty. Stars shed cold, unshimmering light. The heat lighting dancing along the plains spoke of a world of warmth and flatness. The black silhouette of Lhotse lurked half-sensed, half-seen, still below. Only the ridge we were on rose higher, disappearing into the night, a last lonely outpost of the world."*

Interviewer: I hear that sometimes these days, even still, you take a sleeping bag up to a little rock outcrop here behind the house at Lumpy Ridge and spend the night out under the stars. You are 82 years old and I presume you have a comfortable bed. Does that still bring you back to those memories in any way?

Tom Hornbein: Not so much I have to say. When we're out under the stars, it's like you are in that world. It really is in some ways an identical world, the stars my shimmer here a bit, maybe we were too high in the atmosphere for that to be happening up on Everest. In all those years up to and through Everest at least, my affair with bivouacs was not a planned one. They just happened, and alas, one didn't really. I mean the idea of bivouacing on Everest was not part of our thinking. So thinking any bivy sacks weren't part of the scheme of things. You just did what you had to do. That was the way most of my life in the mountains had been. You didn't often get the night, but sometimes you did. The bivouac coming down after the Casual Route in 1995 was the perfect example. Throughout my life there has been a series of those special unplanned moments which are utterly unforgettable moments in their beauty and their aloneness and a certain amount of discomfort. Our bivy on Everest was, it might have been a different story if the wind hadn't died down. Matter of fact, I might not have been here telling the story at all. But we were really lucky, the wind did die down, it was probably 17 below, but we were pretty well dressed with. Clearly Willi and Barry Bishop lost most of their toes, and Barry a few finger tips. It was a night for which we paid a price. I guess you look at it in retrospect, and say, "Was it worth it?" And you might as well answer, "Yes," because that's the way it is, and it was. But you get on with life and do what you can afterwards and that's the way the whole rest of the story flows.

ABSTRACT: Dr. Tom Hornbein first experienced the Estes Valley at age 13 when attending Trail's End Ranch. His passion for climbing grew while attending the University of Colorado and later when serving as a Park Naturalist at Rocky Mountain National Park in summers during his medical school years in St. Louis. He was one of the signers of the Articles of Incorporation of Rocky Mountain Rescue. Tom Hornbein has extensive climbing experience beyond in Rocky Mountain National Park, most notably along with Willi Unsoeld, accomplishing the first ascent of the West Ridge of Mt. Everest in 1963. Dr. Hornbein had a long career at the Departments of Anesthesiology and Physiology and Biophysics at the University of Washington. His interview includes many names of the Estes Park climbing community. Tom retired to Estes Park in 2006. Note: Added material appears in brackets.